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SERIAL NO. 180

THE MENTOR

THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

By F. L. PAYNE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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NUMBER 8

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A Traveler's Reflections on Versailles

FROM the low heights of Satory we get a complete view of the plains of Versailles—the woods, the town and the sumptuous château. The palace on its dais rules the scene. The village and ornamental environment have been constructed to augment its majesty. Even the soil has been "moulded into new forms" at a monarch's caprice. Versailles is the expression of monarchy, as conceived by Louis XIV. It is the only epic produced in his reign—a reign so fertile in the other forms of poetry, and in talent of all kinds. What epic ever chronicled the destiny of an epoch in a manner more brilliant and complete? In this poem of stone the manners of heroic and familiar life mingle at every step. Besides the halls and galleries, the theaters of royal estate, there are mysterious passages and sequestered nooks, that whisper a thousand secret histories. The palace has two voices, one grave and one gay and trifling. It is full of truths and fictions, tears and smiles. The personages of its drama are as various as life itself; kings, poets, ministers, courtiers, confessors, queens without power, and queens with too much power; ambassadors, generals, little abbés and great ladies; nobles, clergy, even the people. For two centuries did this crowd continue to pass and repass over these marble floors and under these gilded vaults; and every day its flood became more impetuous, every day it gave way more and more to the whims and passions.

And the palace heard all, saw all, spied all—and has retained all, each action in its acted hour, each word in its place. During the two centuries of absolute monarchy, nothing took place that Versailles did not either originate or answer. Every shot that was fired in Flanders, Germany, and Spain, awakened here an echo. Richelieu was here, the first statesman of the monarchy, and Necker, the last. French literary history is inscribed on its walls, which received within them the great writers of France from Molière to Beaumarchais. Art erected especially for Versailles schools and systems whose influence has been felt through the succeeding centuries. For Versailles Lebrun became a painter, Coysevox a sculptor and Mansard an architect. But it was not France alone that depended on Versailles. Foreign nations sent their representatives to this famous center; the choice spirits of Europe came to visit it.

The history of Versailles was for two centuries the history of civilization. From Versailles may be seen the movement of manners, wars, diplomacy, literature, arts and energies that agitated Europe.

On entering Versailles by the Paris avenue, we see the palace on the summit of the horizon. The houses, scattered here and there and concealed among the trees, appear less to form a town than to accompany the monument raised beyond and above them. Approaching the Place d'Armes, we distinguish the different parts of which the imposing mass of buildings is composed. In the center is a singular bit of architecture. In vain the neighboring masses extend their circle around it: their great arms are unable to stifle it; but it possesses a seriousness of character which attracts the eye more strongly than their high white walls. This is the remains of the château built by Louis XIII at Versailles. Louis XIV did not wish to bury his father's dwelling.

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THE MENTOR · DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SERIAL NUMBER 180

The Story of Versailles

By FREDERIC L. PAYNE

MENTOR GRAVURES

VERSAILLES IN 1668

FOUNTAIN OF APOLLO

STATUE OF LOUIS XIV

THE OLD MILL
On the site of the first Château of Versailles

MENTOR GRAVURES

STAIRCASE OF THE AMBASSADORS

THE MARBLE COURT

THE HALL OF MIRRORS

A DESOLATE stretch of low-lying marshland where the principal objects that relieved the eye were the crumbling walls of old farm buildings and a lonely windmill standing on a roll of higher ground—such was Versailles (vare-sigh) in 1624. No exercise of the imagination could then have conjured up a picture of the splendor in store for this barren waste, situated eleven miles southwest of Paris. Louis XIII had frequently hunted in the vicinity of Versailles, and occasionally had slept in a low inn or in the hill-top windmill. It occurred to him that it would be convenient to have a pavilion or hunting lodge in this place, to which he could repair after hunts in the forest of St. Leger. A small lodge was soon erected, and, in 1627, Louis ordered a little villa to be built nearby, on the isolated hill where the windmill had stood.

Louis' architects were Le Roy and Lemercier. The new villa was about two hundred feet from the hunting lodge. Its form was square, and there was a tower at each corner. It was built of brick ornamented with columns and gilded balustrades, and was surrounded by a park adorned with statues designed by the artist Poussin (Poo-sahng). The villa was finished in 1630, and the King made it a place of residence during hunting seasons.

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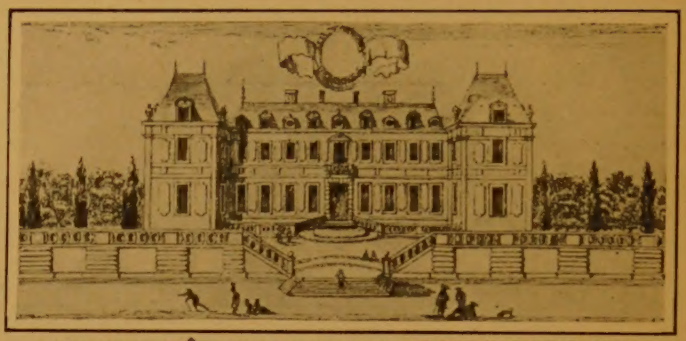


THE FIRST CHÂTEAU OF VERSAILLES, ABOUT THE YEAR 1652
From an engraving of the time by Israel Silvestre

The presence of royalty there had its inevitable effect. The little château at Versailles was soon surrounded by handsome country houses.

When Louis XIII died, in 1643, the villa was abandoned as a dwelling, and the interest of the Court was turned back toward Paris. It looked as if Versailles would soon be forgotten. But when Louis XIV, at twelve years of age, came to hunt in the neighborhood, he found the modest suburban dwelling of his father attractive. The good hunting in the vicinity of Versailles and the simple life of the château delighted the young King, so he made it a custom to visit the place each year. Then, one day, the King, who was not satisfied with Paris as a residence, dreamed a wonderful dream of a greater Versailles—of a palace home so magnificent that it would make the whole world gasp in wonder and amazement. He told Colbert, the Superintendent of Finances, to make his dream come true. Colbert's task in the enlargement of Versailles was no easy one, nor did he approve of it, but the King could not be swerved from his purpose; so Colbert had not only to carry out the gigantic plans born of a king's luxurious imagination, but he also had to find some way to pay the cost.

LOUIS XIV, KING OF FRANCE
From a painting by T. de la Haye

And the cost, extending over many years during which the wondrous dream of Versailles was being made real, was stupendous. Voltaire estimated that Versailles cost France $100,000,000; Mirabeau said it cost $140,000,000; Volney put the figure at $280,000,000; Colbert said that it cost ten times as much as it should have—and His Majesty said he didn't care what it cost. We are told that the Great Monarch, as the bills came in, tore them up so that no one would ever know what the actual expenditures were.

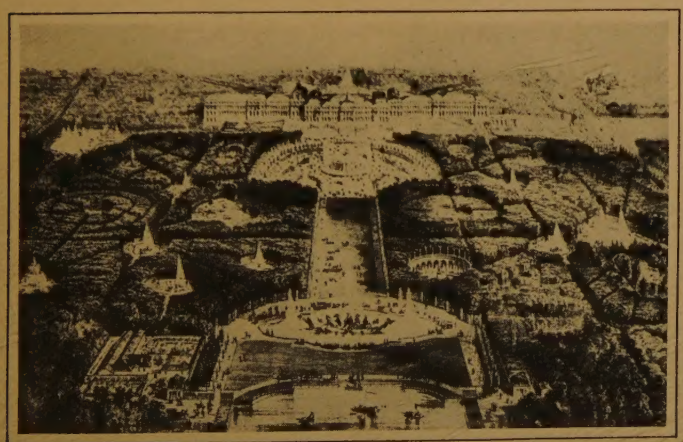
Louis began with the modest villa of his father as a nucleus. About this structure the ambitious plans for the greater Versailles were developed. The King employed, of course, the most renowned masters of the period—among them, Louis Le Vau, the architect, André Le Nôtre, the

celebrated landscape gardener, and Charles Lebrun, the painter and decorator. Le Nôtre planned the gardens and Le Vau devoted himself to the enlargement and decoration of the château. Under them, builders and decorators of skill worked on one elaborate project after another, without regard to expense and despite the protest of Colbert. It was a paradise period for profiteers.

The Making of Versailles

As months and years passed Versailles became the favorite resort of the extravagant young King. He kept in close touch with the work of construction and eagerly urged on the superintendents and builders. In the course of time a wonder palace rose on the site of the little retreat of Louis XIII. Thousands of laborers were engaged and horses without number, new-fangled machinery was devised, barren acres were covered with groves of trees, and dry wastes were turned into canals, pools and fountains by transporting water from distant points. An orangery, a grand terrace, fruit orchards, groves, flower gardens, and a labyrinthine maze were constructed to give delight and diversion to the King's guests. Wide avenues and fair waterways afforded means of approach to these delightful groves and garden spots.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF VERSAILLES
Colbert visiting the work with Mansard
From a painting in the possession of the King of England



PANORAMA OF VERSAILLES AND THE TRIANONS

In the midst of the activities of masons, carpenters, gardeners, painters and decorators Louis was ever dominant, directing minute details—the fashioning of inlaid furniture and floors, the hanging of superb draperies, the designing of paintings for the walls and ceilings, and the placement of precious articles in the palace.

A vast number of works of art were ordered, also, for the adornment of the walks and gardens. Statues and busts of historical and mythological character made at Rome after models by Nicolas Poussin, bronze vases, stone figures of nymphs and dryads and dancing fauns were placed among the trees and fountains. By the year 1668 the great royal château—which had then been seven years in building—was apparently completed. But in 1669 new ideas developed in the Monarch's fertile imagination, and the general plan of the château was enlarged. Once again artisans and workmen flocked to Versailles. Half-finished buildings were demolished, new

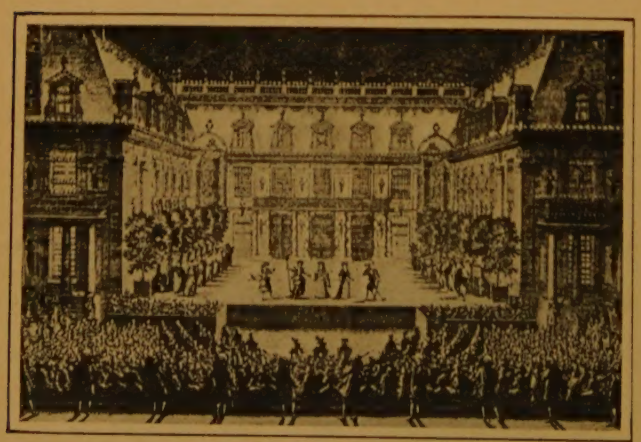
structures arose. A town was created on the surrounding acres purchased by the King. Louis completely transformed the village of Old Versailles and made liberal grants of land to illustrious nobles who built fine mansions close to the château.

THE GRAND TRIANON
From an old engraving showing a fête on the Grand Canal

Le Vau did not live to see the completion of the palace. He died in 1670 and his work was continued by some of his pupils. Notable in the final work of construction was the great Mansard—nephew of the designer and builder who in 1650 revived the use of the "Mansard roof." It was he that gave instructions for the building of the now historic Hall of Mirrors, which runs across the back of the palace and joins the Salon of Peace and the Salon of War. From the high arched windows of this glittering Grand Gallery many great personages in the course of history surveyed the gardens, fountains and broad walks that were the crowning glory of Versailles.

And so the construction of this miracle work of the Great Monarch went on to completion. Each year took its toll in money and men to make this palatial home of Louis the Magnificent. The restless master of the estate was impatient to enjoy his creation, and to celebrate its accomplishment with fêtes brilliant and costly. When, with all his Court, he entered into formal possession of the palace in 1682, 36,000 men and 6,000 horses were still engaged in making matters comfortable and satisfactory for His Glorious Majesty. "The State," exclaimed the Sun King, "it is I!" and he might have said the same of Versailles.

"There is an intimate relation between the King and his château," wrote Imbert de Saint-Amand. "The idol is worthy of the temple, the temple of the idol. Versailles stands for the King. It is he always and everywhere. Nature and Art combine to celebrate the glory of the sovereign by a perpetual Hosannah. All that generations of kings have amassed in pictures, statues and precious movables is distributed as mere furniture in the glittering apartments of the château. The intoxicating perfumes of luxury and power throw one into a sort of ecstasy that makes comprehensible the exaltation of this monarch, enthusiastic over himself, who, in chanting the hymns composed in his praise, shed tears of admiration."



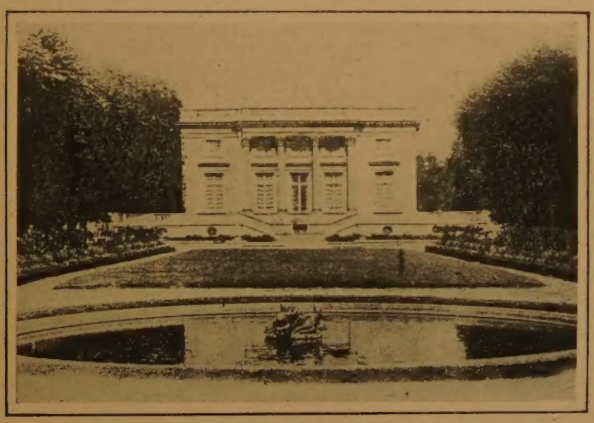
THE MARBLE COURT
During a production of Molière's "Alceste," given before the King in 1674
After a print by Lepautre

The year 1684 saw the completion of the Hall of Mirrors, which was a paramount feature, and the palace then stood forth in all its imposing proportions. Exposed on

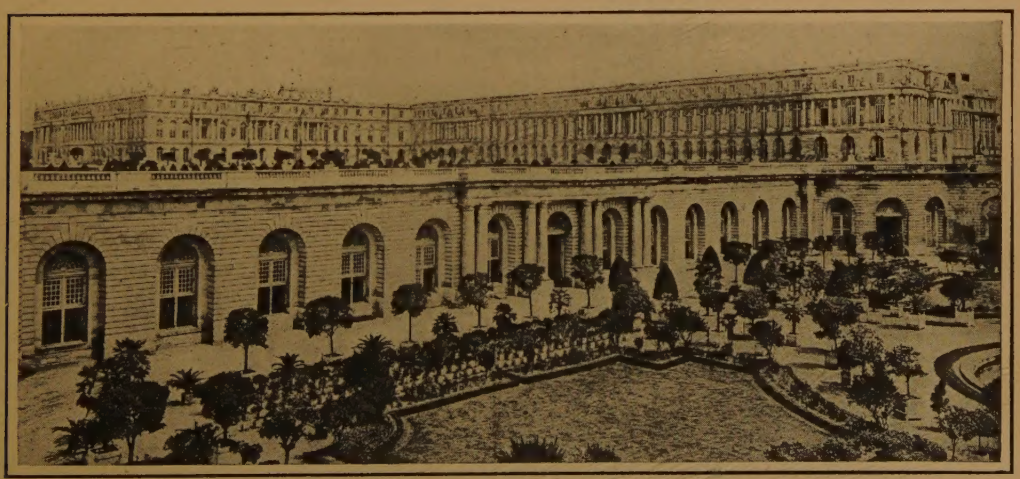
three sides of a main court, the original château was set low on a slight rise of land. The main entrance was flanked by two huge wings on north and south, which were interrupted throughout their length by smaller courts. The domed chapel had not yet been built. This exquisite white stone edifice was constructed much later, and was consecrated in the year 1710. It is an architectural gem executed by some of the best artists of the Sun King's epoch. Here, during the last years of his long and spectacular reign, Louis the Great worshiped. Here Marie Antoinette was married to Louis XVI.

Plan of the Palace

Noble guests arriving at the palace were admitted into the Marble Court. In the center portion the King's own apartments faced them. There, on the second floor, the Royal Master had his private rooms. There, from his windows, facing the east, the Sun King could gaze upon the rising sun. The Grand Apartments were of astounding richness. The rooms were a-glitter with silver, cut glass and gold-embroidered draperies. There were tables of gilded wood and mosaic, Florentine marbles, vases, ebony cabinets inlaid with copper, columns of jasper, agate and lapis lazuli, silver chandeliers, candlesticks, baskets, and vessels for liqueurs. Windows were draped with silver brocade worked in gold thread, or Venetian silks and satins, or embroideries from the Gobelin studios. On the floors were spread carpets woven in designs symbolical of kingly power. The throne-room, known as the Salon of Apollo, the seat of the Sun King, was most imposing. The throne itself was of silver and stood eight feet high. Tapestries representing scenes of splendor in the life of Louis the Great and paintings by Italian artists of the first rank hung on the walls. The Grand Apartments were a fitting climax to the progressive glories of the salons through which guests were conducted before arriving in the Great Presence. Here in his sumptuous



THE PALACE OF THE LITTLE TRIANON



THE CHÂTEAU AND THE ORANGERY FACING THE GARDENS

South wing

Pavilion Dufour

Royal Court in the foreground. Marble Court in the rear

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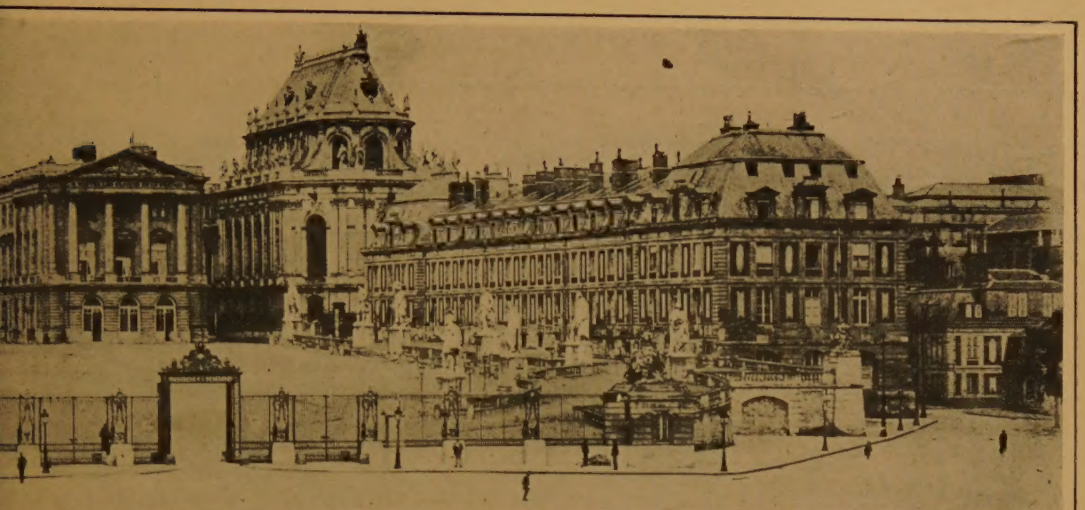
home Louis the Great rose each morning and pursued the duties and pleasures of the day through the last thirty years of his brilliant reign. Here, in his superb bedchamber, the Grand Monarch died in 1715.* In an ante-chamber called the "Bull's Eye," by reason of its unique oval window, courtiers were accustomed to assemble and gossip and intrigue while they awaited the King's arrival. Next to the Bull's Eye was the room in which the King dined. Adjoining were smaller rooms richly stored with objects of art and gems. In Louis' time guests entered the palace from the Marble Court by ascending the magnificent marble stairway on the right called the "Staircase of the Ambassadors." This splendid stairway, which is pictured in Gérôme's great painting, "Reception of the Grand Condé," was removed by the Great Monarch's successor, Louis XV, in compliance with a capricious desire of the latter's favorite, Madame de Pompadour, who turned the hall into a theater to satisfy her selfish pleasure and pride. The destruction of the Staircase of Ambassadors was an irreparable loss. No other piece of wantonness equaled it in the history of the château.

THE FOUNTAIN OF THE DRAGON, BASIN OF NEPTUNE, VERSAILLES
From a painting

The sequence of the Salons of State has been changed since the Sun King occupied Versailles. Visitors today will not find the interior of the palace as Louis XIV designed it. His two successors on the throne, Louis XV and Louis XVI, especially the former, made radical changes. Under the changes made by Louis XV, entrance was gained to the palace on the south side by the doorway leading to the Marble Stairway. This staircase, though handsome, was much less beautiful and impressive than the Ambassadors' Staircase. It led up to the Hall of the Queen's Guards, which adjoined the ample and ornate apartments occupied by Madame de Maintenon. The State Apartments of the Queen were farther on. Marie Thérèse was the first to occupy them. She enjoyed that distinction scarcely more than a year, for she died in the palace on July 30, 1683. The apartments of the children of France were situated near

*Louis XIV reigned from 1643 to 1715.



Pavilion Gabriel | Chapel | North wing | Opera House

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those of the Queen. Relatives and distinguished members of the nobility were quartered in rich apartments in the great North and South Wings, some occupying rooms on the first floor. On the third floor—what we might call the "Mansard Attic"—were rooms that were occupied by favorites of the King, and, at other times, were used as offices by officials of the palace. As if all this luxurious chateau, occupying acres of land, were not sufficient to house those worthy of the King's favor, two extra pleasure palaces were built on the property of Versailles—the Great and Little Trianon. In the first of these châteaux, small in comparison with the palace, and much simpler in appointments, Madame de Maintenon found quiet and repose and a tranquil companionship with her Sire that was not possible in the Grand Quarters; later on, Madame de Pompadour found diversion in the attractive Little Trianon by "playing house" with the bored and jaded Louis XV; and, lastly, the ill-fated Marie Antoinette spent there some of the rare hours of happiness that she was permitted to enjoy in her tragic life.

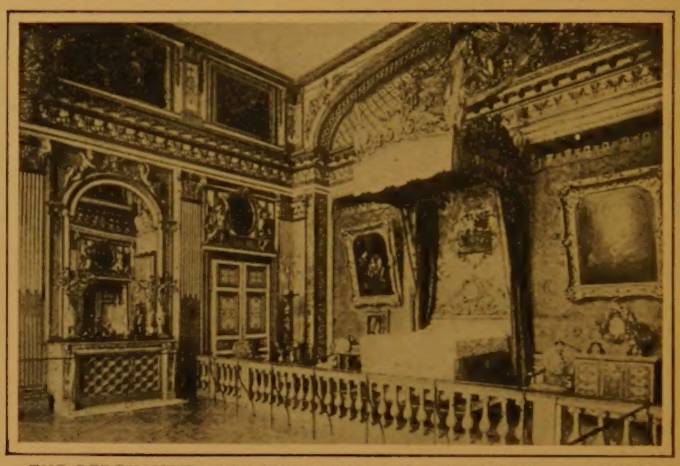
The Gaiety and Diversions of Versailles

Although Louis set his court at Versailles in 1682, he had been organizing festivities there at one time or another during the course of twenty years. As early as 1663 the King gave a fête in which a troupe headed by the great Molière was heard in a piece entitled "*Impromptu de Versailles.*" In May, 1664 Louis ordered a performance of "Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle," in which Molière furnished the comedy and Lully the music. The plays given were followed by ballets, races, tourneys, and a lottery in which the prizes were silverware and precious stones. In 1665 a hunt was organized in the woods of Versailles, where the royal ladies wore Amazon costumes. A mid-winter tournament was given in 1667, in which Louis himself took part, clothed in a rich Hungarian habit covered with gold and precious stones. Again in the summers of 1668 and 1672 Molière and Lully entertained the guests at the King's château, and the gardens were brilliantly illuminated. In 1674 Molière was no longer alive to arrange the performances among the green and flowery gardens at Versailles, but there was no lack of entertainment at the splen-

ENTRANCE TO THE LABYRINTH

From a painting by Cotelle for the Trianon Gallery. This feature of the gardens no longer exists

did fêtes that year. After Louis and his Court took up their residence in the palace, in 1682, state balls and receptions were given on numerous occasions to royal personages and envoys from other lands.



THE BEDCHAMBER OF LOUIS XIV IN THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES

When the King was not occupied with the duties and ceremonies of his Court, he found pleasure in various outdoor occupations. When he had finished with a cabinet meeting he often amused himself by playing with his dogs. Once each week, or oftener, he would go stag hunting or shooting in his parks—and no man handled the gun with greater skill than he. If not walking in his gardens to supervise his workmen, he would take the air on horseback. The King was fond of hunting, and the chase held an important part in the service of the royal household. The ceremonials of the royal hunt were, like all the court affairs, impressive in detail. The King's life was a busy one from morning till night. He never shirked his kingly duties. It was a principle of his life to place duty first and pleasure after. He recognized and responded faithfully to the requirements and demands of royalty—and he pursued his pleasures with equal zest and devotion. It was his pride and satisfaction to make Versailles not only a superb palace of pleasure but a court that would stand as a worthy model for all the kingdoms of the world.

THE MARBLE STAIRWAY
Called the "Stairway of the Queen"

The Women of Versailles

No story of Versailles would be complete without some account of the brilliant women that figured in the life of the Court and exerted influence for good or evil over the affairs of France. Sad queens were there who, though sharing the crown, lived an existence of bitter disappointment and thwarted affection—queens simply in name, serving only as mothers of princes and future monarchs. Such were Marie Thérèse, the heart-sick wife of Louis XIV, and Marie Lesczinska, the unhappy consort of Louis XV. About them were many fair women that graced the palace with their beauty and charm and made romantic court history that the chroniclers of the time fed on eagerly, and that the curious reading public has devoured eagerly ever since. Rich were those years in intrigue and adventure, and many and rapid were the changing fortunes of favorites. Grim, determined strugglers for social preference frequented the salons with smiling faces that sometimes glowed with pride and satisfaction, but more often veiled rankling disappointment and carking care.

Even the great Madame de Maintenon, who weathered the storms of the social struggle successfully for so many years, once exclaimed: "I can hold out no longer. I wish that I were dead." And a short time before her demise, she observed bitterly,

"One atones in full for youthful joys and gratification. I can see, as I review my life, that since I was twenty-two years of age—when my good fortune began—I have not been free from suffering for a moment; and, through my life, my sufferings increased."

If Madame de Maintenon confessed so much in her last days, what must the other favorites of Versailles have experienced and felt? Each wore the Mask of Comedy, with Tragedy gnawing beneath. These fascinating women, who seemed at times to be so happy, were little more than slaves, and we find them disclosed in the memoirs of the time as "penitents who make their apologies to history and lay bare to future generations their miseries, vexations and the remorse of their souls."

"If," exclaimed Saint-Amand, "among these favorites of the King, there were a single one that had enjoyed her shameful triumphs in peace, that could have recalled herself happy in the midst of her luxury and splendor, one might have concluded that, from a merely human point of view, it is possible to find happiness in vice. But no; there was not even one. The Duchesse de Châteauroux and Marquise de Pompadour were no happier than the Duchesse de La Vallière and the Marquise de Montespan."

The Sun King built Versailles and established his Court there. It was the women that made the life of Versailles—and gave their lives to it. The Court was a dazzling spider's web, and many a beautiful favorite became fatally entangled in its glittering meshes.

LOUIS XIV AND MOLIÈRE
The King invited the great actor-dramatist to sup with him as a rebuke to his courtiers, who resented the favor Molière enjoyed.
From a painting by Jean Léon Gérôme

THE ANTE-CHAMBER OF THE BULL'S EYE (*L'Oeil de Boeuf*)
The oval window above the fireplace gave the room its name

As we review the story of the women of Versailles, we are caught first by the picture of the gentle and attractive little Louise de La Vallière. She attracted Louis XIV early in life. She played like a child with him in the parks of the palace. A few years after, she was created a duchess and was in the favor of the court for a time. Then remorse seized her—she took the veil, entered a convent and gave her life to religious solitude. Then came the beautiful Madame de Montespan who ruled the court for a while with a pride and arrogance that equaled her beauty. She gave way finally to the greatest of all the women of Versailles—Madame de Maintenon, who gained such an influence over Louis XIV that he made her his second wife; she

held a firm, guiding hand in the affairs of the Court until the King's death. During the reign of Louis XV, the women that held influence with the King were far from being a credit to the Court or the Crown. There was the selfish, imperious Madame de Pompadour, and then the impossible, outrageous Dubarry. The devout Queen, Marie Lesczinska, upheld the morals and manners at Versailles. She was the pure, virtuous figure that preserved the traditions of decency in the Court. Associated with the pious Queen were two lovely daughters of Louis XV, whose sweet graciousness shed a light of tender devotion over the royal apartments—the fair Sophie and regal Adelaïde, known to us today by their exquisite portraits painted by Nattier (nat'-tee-ay). Last of all the notable women of Versailles came Marie Antoinette, the young bride and pathetic wife of Louis XVI—the woman who "in the most striking and tragic of all destinies represents not solely the majesty and the griefs of royalty, but all the graces and all the agonies, all the joys and all the sufferings of her sex."

LOUIS XIV, THE DAUPHIN, THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY, THE DUKE OF ANJOU (afterward Louis XV) AND MADAME DE MAINTENON

From a painting by Largillière, in the Wallace Collection, London

The Twilight of the Bourbons

No sooner had the Sun King passed away than clouds began to gather about the Court of Versailles. The reign of Louis the Great had been a successful one from the point of brilliancy, but it had caused the people a frightful price in money and human lives. The shining splendor of his own immediate circle blinded the eyes of Louis to all of France that lay outside Versailles. In the hey-dey of his gorgeous reign he sowed the seeds of the whirlwind and the storm fell mercilessly upon his descendants and his Court. It must be said for the Bourbon monarchs that immediately followed him that they hastened the end—Louis XV by his prodigal extravagance, dissolute habits, and cynical indifference to his people; and Louis XVI who, though amiable, was weak and vacillating, and utterly unable to cope with the stern circumstances in which he found himself.

QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE AND LOUIS XVI IN THE GARDENS OF VERSAILLES

Detail from a painting by Hubert Robert

The last days of royalty at Versailles were characteristic of the young pair that ruled there. The King was brought from his hunting, the Queen from her diversions in the Petit Trianon—both of them from trivial affairs—to face the fury of outraged France. "The people are starving for bread," was the cry that went up to Marie Antoinette. "If they have no bread," answered the thoughtless little Queen, "why don't they eat cake?" In that historic remark of the frivolous Queen was reflected

the careless luxury of Versailles in contrast to the wretched conditions of the people of France. The clouds thickened; the people's representatives gathered in the Tennis Court near the walls of the château and made oath as citizens of France that they would give their country a constitution and be rid of royalty forever. The Bastille was assailed and destroyed, and finally the ravenous men and women of the streets gathered into a mighty mob that swept out from Paris and rolled like a flood along the eleven-mile road to Versailles. When the King and Queen were called upon they showed themselves on the balcony of the royal apartments. The Court of Marble was in awful commotion. The people demanded that the King and Queen should leave Versailles and go back to Paris. Under the protection of the Marquis de Lafayette, and accompanied by a howling rabble, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were dragged in a coach to the Palace of the Tuileries. Thereafter, and until their execution, they were virtually prisoners in Paris.

Such was the end of royal Versailles. Who can contest its tragic grandeur? In these halls, these gardens, these secluded villas the supreme destiny of the Bourbon Monarchy was achieved. They witnessed the rise, the decline and the ruin of the dynasty.

After the fall of Louis XVI the château passed through many vicissitudes. Most of the interior fittings that had made royal Versailles a place of luxury were removed. Many of the magnificent pieces of furniture, silver and fine china, beautiful tapestries, glass, candelabra and chandeliers were sold or turned over to officers of one kind or another in return for service during the turbulent times of the Revolution and thereafter. During the Revolution the palace fell into disuse; then it housed a museum and a school for the people. Napoleon never fancied Versailles—perhaps his innate superstition warned him against it as a scene of royal misfortune. Under LouisPhilippe it was established as a National Museum of Arts and History.

Modern Versailles

Today, Versailles is known as a place of historic memories and the scene of three epoch-making events of the world's history. During and shortly after the American Revolution the palace was the scene of treaty negotiations in which France, England and America were the active participants. About a century later, in 1871, after the Emperor of Germany had been crowned in the Hall of Mirrors, negotiations were consummated in Bismarck's headquarters in the town of Versailles that ended the Franco-Prussian War. France lost Alsace and Lorraine and was forced to pay to Germany $1,000,000,000. And now, in our day, by the most superb irony in history, a peace convention in that same Hall of Mirrors forces Germany to repay, and makes radical changes in the map of Europe.

INTERIOR OF THE CHAPEL OF VERSAILLES
Designed by Mansard

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

THE STORY OF VERSAILLES - - - - - - - - *By F. L. Payne*
VERSAILLES AND THE COURT UNDER LOUIS XIV - - *By James Eugene Farmer*
GOSSIP AND GLORY OF VERSAILLES, Memoirs of the Duke de Saint Simon

*** Information concerning the above books may be had on application to the Editor of The Mentor.

THE OPEN LETTER

What kind of men will the future leaders of nations be? Not rulers by "Divine Right" we may be sure. Versailles, Potsdam and the Kremlin are monuments to the monstrous selfish ambition and autocratic domination of Kings, Emperors and Czars. They have had their sway, and the years echo with the bitter protests of nations. At times in history the voices of the people have prevailed and kingdoms have been consumed in the flames of revolution. Then, out of the ashes of empire, men have risen who have pointed the way to freedom. But freedom was not so easily to be achieved. The long implanted seeds of monarchism could not be eradicated in a day. The men that led the people were not always true apostles of democracy: and the people themselves were not always ready to understand and appreciate a true apostle when he appeared.

Napoleon rose from the common people, and yet, when he became the leading figure in France, he assumed the Imperial crown. On the other hand, George Washington led the American Colonies to victory in their War for Independence, and then, so ill advised were some of his followers that they offered him kingly power. Napoleon aspired to absolute rule over dominions greater than those of the kings that preceded him—and ended his days in exile. George Washington rejected with scorn and indignation the suggestion of dictatorship, and established the First Republic of the World. The contrast of the two characters is significant. Napoleon, of lowly origin, gained power and became an autocratic ruler; Washington, a well-born gentleman, gave his life to the people, and blazed the way to national freedom.

What do we look for, then, in our future leaders? Not "Divine Right" nor birthright. The low-born man, embittered against social conditions, may win a large following. There are plenty of discontented ones ready to respond to the call of a demagogue. But if, beneath his protestations, lies a consuming personal ambition, he may prove to be an ugly master when in power. The high-born man, on the other hand, may have cultivated theories of national administration that are not practical or safe.

The answer is not to be found in class distinction. It is not a case of birth at all. In the history of the United States two men won from the hearts of the people the title of "Father": George Washington and Abraham Lincoln—the one of high, the other of humble birth. Both were examples of noble, unselfish leadership; both models of simple, common, honest, high-minded citizenship. What was it that the Master of Mount Vernon and the homely son of Nancy Hanks possessed in common? It was a soul truly and fully dedicated to the people's welfare. It was a principle, not of personal ambition, but of self-sacrificing service. Both of these men were "highly resolved"—without thought of how it might affect their own individual destinies—that "government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

In the crucible of time the elements of a world citizenship are astir. Let us have faith that the purest and soundest metal will prevail.

W. D. Moffat

EDITOR

THE HALL OF MIRRORS

If you could speak what tales your tongues could tell,
You voiceless mirrors of the storied past!
Do you remember when the curtain fell
On him who learned he was not God at last?

Do you still see the shadows of the great?
On powdered wigs and velvets, silks and lace;
Or dream at night a fated queen, in state,
Accepts men's homage with a haughty face?

A thousand names come tumbling to the mind
Of dead who gazed upon themselves through you,
And went their way, each one his end to find
In paths that glory or red terror knew.

Voltaire and Rousseau and Ben Franklin here
You've seen hobnobbing with the highly-born;
Seen Genius smile, while, with a hint of fear,
It gave to Birth not homage but its scorn.

Do you remember that Teutonic jaw
Of him who crowned an emperor, that you
Might know that Bismarck was above all law
And free to do what victor vandals do?

Oh, Hall of Visions, now shall come anon
A grander sight than you have ever seen;
You've mirrored kings, but you shall look upon
The mighty men whose edicts freedom mean.

To races and to peoples sore oppressed
The men who mould the future for a race
That breathes a wind that's blowing from the West—
And you'll forget the Bourbon's evil face!

—EDWARD S. VAN ZILE.

THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

The Beginnings of Versailles

ONE

ANCIENT records of France indicate that in the year 1065 the priory of St. Julien was established on the estates of the house of Versaliïs—a grant under royal protection. A poor farm community grew up about the ecclesiastical retreat. Here, also, on the estates of the barony of Versailles, was a repair of lepers, destroyed in the sixteenth century. The origin of the name is said by some to be derived from the fact that the plains thereabouts were exposed to such high winds that the grain in the poor land was frequently overturned (*versés*). The lord of these acres first named in history is Hugues (Hugo) de Versaliïs, who lived early in the eleventh century and was a contemporary of the first kings of the Capet dynasty. A long line of nobles of this family succeeded him. In 1561, Martial de Léomenie, Secretary of Finances to Charles IX, became master of Versailles. The farming village being on the route between Paris and Brittany, he obtained the King's permission to establish here four annual fairs and a weekly market on Thursdays. Martial perished in the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572. Henry IV, as a prince, when hunting the stag with Martial, often swept across the low plains of Versailles. The rights to the lands of the barony were acquired by Maréchal de Retz from the children of Martial de Léomenie, and inherited from the noble duke by his son, Jean François de Gondi, first archbishop of France. It was this prelate that sold to Louis XIII in 1632, for 66,000 pounds (about $27,400), the land and barony of Versailles, consisting, in the phrase of the original deed, "of an old house in ruins and a farm with several buildings."

The Court resented the villa on the old mill site, the nobility despised it. It was the King's fancy; nothing else excused it. A noble of the Court, Bassompierre, exclaimed that "it was a wretched château, in the construction of which no private gentlemen could be vain."

Scarcely was his new château finished, in 1630, when the King took up his residence there for the hunt. In this place were terminated in November, 1630, the autocratic services of Cardinal Richelieu to the King—the first of many significant historical events to take place there.

When on April 8, 1632, Louis XIII came into possession of the feudal dwelling of Jean François de Gondi and its lands, Versailles began to acquire distinction. It was the King's resort. Could anyone afford to question its character, or location, or the standing of those that, at the King's behest, took up their residence there? Not we surely, who can now view Versailles in the light of history.

At the death of Louis XIII, in 1643, his modest residence at Versailles was abandoned as a dwelling. Eight years later the *Gazette* reported as a matter of special interest the visit to Versailles of the twelve-year-old Louis XIV, and described the supper that the royal boy shared with the officials of the château. Two months later the King supped again at Versailles, and was so delighted with the estate and the hunting to be had thereabouts that, thereafter, he made it a yearly custom to visit the domain once or twice in the hunting season, sometimes with his brother, sometimes with his prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin.

Returning in 1652 from an interview at Corbeil with Charles II of England, then seeking refuge in France, Louis XIV dined at Versailles with his mother, Anne of Austria. In October, 1660, four months after his marriage to Marie Thérèse of Spain, he brought his young queen there. The future of Versailles was assured. The Monarch had decided to set his star and make his royal home where his father had established a hunting lodge.

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FROM A PAINTING BY PATEL

CHÂTEAU OF VERSAILLES AS IT APPEARED IN 1668

THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

Parks, Gardens and the Grand Trianon

TWO

THE first gardens of Versailles—those that gave a modest setting to the villa constructed for Louis XIII, comprised a few parterres of flowers and shrubs bounded by well trimmed box hedges, and two groves planted on each side of the *Allée Royale*. To Jacques Boyceau (boy-so) is accredited the first plan of the gardens of Versailles, but André Le Nôtre (an-dray luh notr) greatly amplified and improved the original scheme. Le Nôtre's achievements at Versailles gave him rank as the most distinguished landscape gardener of his time, and of all time

Besides the luxurious and symmetrical gardens at Versailles, he originated the designs of those at the royal houses at Trianon, Saint-Cloud, Merly, Clagny, Chantilly and the Tuileries. The Parterre of the Tiber at Fontainebleau also added to his high reputation. For a long period the style of garden perfected by Le Nôtre was taken as a model and imitated throughout Europe. At Rome the eminent artist from France was commissioned to plan the gardens of the Quirinal and the Vatican. Kensington Park in London is still another example of Le Nôtre's skill. In his genius were reflected the qualities that distinguished the art of his century: regularity of design, harmony, dignity, and richness of materials. Louis XIV had an enduring admiration for the work and character of the Chief Gardener.

We are told by a French chronicler that "when Le Nôtre had traced out his ideas (for the adornment of the grounds about the palace), he brought Louis XIV to a certain spot to judge the distribution of the principal parts of the ornamentation. He began with the two grand basins which are on the terrace in front of the garden side of the château, and elaborated on the magnificent decorations designed for these basins. He explained next his idea of the double flight of stairs, which is opposite the center of the palace and is adorned with yew-trees and statues. He passed then to the project of the expanse of lawn called the 'Green Carpet,' and to that place where we see the head of the Grand Canal, of which he described the proposed size and shape, and at the extremities of whose arms he placed the Trianon and the Menagerie. At each of the main pieces whose position Le Nôtre marked, and whose future beauties he described, Louis XIV interrupted him, saying, 'Le Nôtre, I give you twenty thousand francs.' This magnificent approbation was so frequently repeated that it annoyed Le Nôtre, whose soul was as noble and disinterested as that of his master was generous. At the fourth interruption (after Louis had impulsively bestowed upon him no less than a hundred thousand dollars), Le Nôtre stopped and said brusquely to the King, 'Sire, Your Majesty shall hear no more. I shall ruin you.'"

During the life of Le Nôtre, a score of splendid garden and park decorations were executed. The most remarkable were the Grand Canal, a mile in length, the Menagerie, with its palatial homes for furred and feathered guests, the Fountains of Latona, Apollo and Neptune, the Orangery, with room for two thousand trees set out in tubs, and the Lake of the Swiss Guards. In all, fourteen hundred fountain jets animated the gardens of Versailles.

To appreciate the engineering skill of the directors of fountain construction at Versailles it must be remembered that it was on an arid plateau that hundreds of streams were made to spring. Thousands of laborers were employed to lay beneath the surface of the ground a net-work of canals and acqueducts to receive the tribute of water-courses directed hither from distant sources. The waters were finally pumped into immense reservoirs cleverly concealed on the roofs of buildings overlooking the park. From these tanks a maze of pipes carried the water to thickets, grottoes, basins, fountains and canals.

Beyond the palace and the surrounding gardens lay the park in which the Grand Trianon was built near the bank of the Grand Canal, on the site of a hamlet torn down at the command of Louis XIV. The marble Trianon was completed in 1688 and Madame de Maintenon was housed within its sumptuous walls. Louis XIV and Louis XV delighted in this retreat, and often came here to escape the exacting routine of Court life. Napoleon I and Louis Philippe used the Grand Trianon as a place of residence instead of the palace of Versailles.

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THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

The Sun King and His Court

THREE

LOUIS the Magnificent was made for a brilliant court. The Duke of Saint-Simon, one of his distinguished courtiers, wrote of him: "In the midst of other men, his figure, his courage, his grace, his beauty, his grand mien, even the tone of his voice and the majestic and natural charm of all his person, distinguished him till his death as the King Bee, and showed that if he had been born only a simple private gentleman, he would have excelled in fêtes, pleasures and gallantry."

The King's day at Versailles was a round of sumptuous detail, from the formal rising in the morning to the hour when, with equal pomp, the monarch went to bed. Before eight o'clock in the morning, the waiting-room next the King's bedchamber was the gathering-place of princes, nobles and officers of the Court, each fresh from his own laving and bewigging. While they passed the time in low converse, the formal ceremony of the King's awakening took place behind the gold and white doors of the royal sleeping-room.

As the clock chimed the hour of eight o'clock, the chief *valet de chambre* approached the embroidered red velvet curtains of the royal bed with the announcement, "Sire, it is the hour." Thereupon followed the long and elaborate ceremonial of the King's rising and his toilet. Surrounded and attended by princes, nobles and high officers, His Majesty chose his wig for the day, and shaved and dressed with punctilious care. Then the doors of the ante-chamber were opened and the "grand rising" began—so called in distinction from the more intimate rising in the bed-chamber. Altogether, no less than one hundred and fifty persons would be present while the King went through the daily ceremony of the rising and toilet.

When His Majesty had breakfasted on a service of porcelain and gold, and had attended prayers, he permitted his sword and jeweled orders to be fastened on, chose his cravats and handkerchiefs, and then called for his Council. The morning passed with affairs of State, in which Louis always busied himself earnestly. He never shirked his kingly duties and obligations. Ordinarily, when at Versailles, the King dined alone at one o'clock, seated by the middle window of his chamber, overlooking the courtyards, the Place d'Armes, and the long avenue that led to Paris. His Majesty's dinner was a most impressive affair, in which more than three hundred persons—stewards, chefs, butlers, gentlemen servants, carvers, cupbearers, tablesetters, cellarers, gardeners—were concerned.

Unless the Sovereign dined in the privacy of his bedchamber, he was surrounded by princes and courtiers. At "public dinners" a procession of well-dressed persons continually passed through the room to observe the King at his dining.

On rare occasions when the King was in residence at Versailles, his brother dined with him. But large, formal dinners were rare, and women were seldom at the King's table except on grand occasions.

The afternoon would be devoted to recreation and a somewhat less formal association with the members of his Court and with guests. Pleasant hours were spent in the gardens of Versailles or in hunting. On his return from outdoor exercise or diversion, His Majesty would again change his costume and repair to his cabinet for a short period of rest or work. At ten o'clock supper would be served in the ante-chamber called the "Bull's Eye."

This meal was always on a pretentious scale, and was attended at table by the royal children and numerous courtiers and ladies. When the last course had been served the King retired to his bedchamber, and there for a few moments received all his Court, before passing into his Cabinet, where he spent something less than an hour in the company of his immediate household, his brother seated in an armchair, the princesses upon stools, and the Dauphin and all the other princes standing.

When the King had bade the company good-night he entered his sleeping-room, where were already assembled the courtiers privileged to attend the ceremony of the *coucher* (koo-shay) or "going-to-bed." This was as imposing in its ceremonial details as the "rising." First came the *grand coucher*, which many members of the court attended. The King dismissed his royal attendants gradually and in order, as he divested himself of his apparel. All those that were entitled to remain for the *petit coucher* (little "going-to-bed)" —princes, clergymen, officers, chosen intimates—then disposed themselves about the bedchamber. The King, after bathing his face and hands in a silver basin held by a royal prince, bowed and withdrew. The assemblage that witnessed the ceremony of retirement dwindled one by one until at last only the first *valet de chambre* remained in the bedroom. Outside the gilded balustrade he slept on a folded cot. Beyond that balustrade, by the faint candle-light, there loomed along the shadows a white-plumed canopy and crimson curtains. There the Grand Monarch lay in slumber.

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FIGURE BY PETITOT. HORSE BY CARTELLIER

STATUE OF LOUIS XIV. IN THE MARBLE COURT AT VERSAILLES

THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

Festivities and Ceremonials

FOUR

THE ceremonious routine of life at Versailles was enlivened at certain times of the year by gala days and nights of astounding brilliancy, and on occasion, by gorgeous receptions offered to visiting rulers and ambassadors. "The King," says Felibien, a fastidious chronicler of Court doings in the time of Louis XIV, "ordained as soon as he arrived at Versailles that festivities be arranged at once, and that, at intervals, new diversions should be prepared for the pleasure of the Court. The things most noticeable at such times as these were the promptitude, minute pains and silent ease with which the King's orders were invariably executed. Like a miracle—all in a moment—theaters rose, wooded places were made gay with fountains, collations were spread, and a thousand other things were accomplished that one would have supposed would require a long time and a vast bustle of workers."

During the "Grand Fêtes," which occupied six days of the months of July and August, 1674, the royal family and a multitude of guests attended superbly appointed feasts, outdoor balls, and operatic productions executed on a stage in the Marble Court. The windows facing the court were ablaze with two rows of candles. The walls of the château were screened with orange trees, festooned with flowers, illuminated by candelabra made of silver and crystal. The spraying waters of a central fountain escaped through vases of flowers, that their falling should not interrupt the voices of those on the stage. Artificial waters, silver-sconced tapers, bowers of blossoms and shrubs united to create the richest of settings for this open-air theater.

At the last elaborate fête organized by Louis the Great, the Court witnessed a magic spectacle, thus described by a witness: "The grand terrace in front of the château was bordered by a double row of lights. The steps and railings of the horseshow, all the walls, all the fountains, all the reservoirs, shone with myriad flames. The borders of the Grand Canal were adorned with statues and architectural decorations, behind which lights had been placed to make them transparent. The King, the Queen, and all the Court took their seats in richly ornamented gondolas. Boats filled with musicians followed them, and Echo repeated the sounds of an enchanted harmony."

The Versailles calendar of events was divided into three periods: the season of the winter carnival, the pious observances of Easter, and the summer-time festivities. Ordinarily in the winter months there was a hunt on foot or horseback almost every day. In the warm season the Court often took part in a promenade by boat on the Grand Canal, followed by a concert and a feast for the ladies at Trianon or at the Menagerie. Sometimes the guests were invited to walk among Louis' beloved orange trees, or make a tour of the garden in light carriages, drawn by liveried runners.

Besides balls, concerts, plays, games of chance, masquerades, hunts, all the Court was invited every week—between October and Easter—to take part in the *appartements* or receptions given by the King. These soirées began at seven o'clock and lasted till ten. The chief diversions were games of cards. Sometimes the losses of the players at the tables were enormous; again, nobles counted their gains by the hundred thousands.

When the King of France received foreign ambassadors, or celebrated, with pomp befitting his tastes, marriages and births in the royal family, the Court, weightily, stiffly, sumptuously appareled, thronged through the Hall of Mirrors in spectacular defile.

These brilliant tableaux—the most brilliant of all Europe, had their source in the King's love of splendor and profusion. It was to please him that his courtiers and favorites staked fortunes at the gaming tables, outran each other in devising costly dresses, contrived novel equipages and unique dwellings. In his superb Court he found all the elements required to satisfy his pride, and glorify his reign. The Sun King was the most magnificent host in all history. Determined to outdo the fabulous luxury of the feasts of Lucullus in early Roman times, and to outshine the storied splendor of Oriental princes, he entertained his courtiers with lavish liberality, superbly indifferent to the cost of his boundless extravagance and considering not at all the day of reckoning that must come later for the Bourbon dynasty in France.

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THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

The Passing of Royal Versailles

FIVE

IT was on a May morning in the year 1770 that the child-bride of the Dauphin of France arrived at Versailles—the graceful, winsome, golden-haired Marie Antoinette. The future queen of France was then not fifteen years of age, and the Dauphin, her affianced husband, was but a few months older. Letters to her family in Austria give us glimpses of the wedding in the Chapel of Versailles, of the fêtes, the dances, the banquets and the hunting parties. "Our life here is perpetual movement," wrote the Dauphine to her sister. "There is too much etiquette here to live the family life," she lamented to her mother. "Altogether, the Court of Versailles is a little dull, the formalities are so fatiguing."

In 1774, four years after the marriage of Marie Antoinette to the Dauphin, Louis XV was taken ill of smallpox. Within a fortnight he was dead, and a scandalous reign was ended. "The rush of the Courtiers, with a noise like thunder, as they hastened to pay homage to the new sovereign," writes a chronicler of the Queen's story, "was the first announcement of the great event to the young heir and his wife." The new king had not yet reached his twentieth year. "God help and protect us!" they both cried on their knees, "We are too young to reign!"

As Queen of France, Marie Antoinette occupied a series of superbly appointed rooms in the left wing of the palace. Beyond a dark passageway were her husband's apartments. Her bedchamber was the scene of the formal toilet, a ceremony always irksome to the youthful mistress of Versailles, who, whenever possible, evaded the demands of her high estate.

Amid all the follies and splendors of life at Versailles appeared the sturdy figure of Benjamin Franklin. In the year 1767 he was presented at Court on the occasion of his first visit to Paris. He found the palace imposing, but declared it "a prodigious mixture of magnificence and negligence." He next appeared at the Court of Versailles upon the momentous occasion of the ratification of the alliance signed in 1778 by France and America.

Bored by incessant publicity, finding no pleasure in the formal promenades of the palace park, the gay, ease-loving, oft-times imprudent young queen pleaded for "a house of her own," where she could find recreation after her own tastes, unobserved by the curious and the critical. Louis XV had built near the Grand Trianon a small villa for Madame de Pompadour. Madame Dubarry succeeded her as chatelaine, and richly embellished the interior of the delectable retreat.

When Marie Antoinette desired to possess a *maison de plaisance* of which she should be sole mistress, the King bade her accept for her own use the Grand and the Petit Trianon and their flower-decked pleasure-grounds. Often the Queen resided at the Petit Trianon for weeks at a time, playing dairymaid to her prize herd, picking berries in her garden patch. In 1789, on the fifth day of October, the queen was at Trianon when the news came of the approach of the mob of starving, angry women that stormed the road from Paris, swept across the Place d'Armes, and surged about the doors of the despised palace. On that day, Marie Antoinette left her "little house," never to see it again.

In November, 1787, the *Notables* had assembled at Versailles in the grand hall of the palace guards. In May, 1789, the Salon of Hercules witnessed the presentation of the twelve hundred deputies elected by the people in all parts of France to the States-General. On June twentieth, the people's representatives gathered in the bare tennis-court and swore their historic oath. On the evening of the first of October occurred the fatal banquet of the King's Guards in the palace theater.

Four days later, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were made prisoners within the walls of Versailles. A night of horror followed. The parterres, the courts, even the salons, swarmed with ruffians that had marched out from Paris to menace Versailles.

At last, the King, overcome by dread, was forced to agree to the demand of the people that he go to Paris. In leaving his palace he knew he was finally surrendering all his claims to royalty. About noon on the sixth day of October, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, under the protection of the Marquis de Lafayette, turned their faces forever from Versailles. It was not long before the immense sepulcher of regal glory was dismantled and forsaken.

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THE STORY OF VERSAILLES

The House of a Thousand Memories

SIX

DURING the Revolution a number of pictures and objects of art contained in the palace of Versailles and the two Trianons were removed to Paris and hung in the Museum of the Louvre, which had been founded in 1775. In July, 1793, the Convention decreed the establishment at Versailles of a provincial school and a museum of art and natural history. After several years of contention on the part of the enemies of autocratic Versailles, the Convention definitely saved the palace for the nation by the decrees of 1794 and 1795. During this epoch of violence and revolt, thousands of articles were offered for sale at the stables of Versailles. Chairs of tapestry and gilt were dispersed that would today command extravagant sums; desks of exquisite marquetry, at which kingly documents and *billet doux* had been penned; dressing-tables whose mirrors had reflected the faces, sad or gay, frank or subtle, of queens and mistresses; wardrobes that had held the linens and brocades of princes and courtiers; clocks of gold and enamel that had registered the hours of portentous births and marriages. Newspapers were filled with the advertisements of second-hand dealers offering to the public these souvenirs—redolent, gorgeous, tragic—of a dead-and-gone dynasty, of an epoch vanished never to return.

Fêtes of the Republic frequently took place about a national altar raised near the Lake of the Swiss Guards and a Tree of Liberty was planted with great solemnity in the court of the château, where the equestrian statue of Louis XIV now stands. With the beginning of Napoleon's reign, Versailles and the Trianons became once more part of the Crown lands.

In 1811, Napoleon, then in residence at the Grand Trianon, took under advisement the complete reconstruction of the palace, but the fall of the Empire saved the palace from the threatened renovation. When Louis XVIII ascended the throne of his Bourbon ancestors, he restored the Hall of Mirrors and all that was especially associated with Louis XIV. He cleaned and simplified the interior, restored paintings and gilt embellishments, and with great care put in order the entire palace and its surroundings.

Following the Revolution of July, 1830, Louis Philippe, "the Citizen King," dedicated the huge pile "To all the Glories of France." The National Museum of Versailles was inaugurated in 1837. Says a French author, writing two years after the opening of the Museum: "The king determined that the palace of Louis XIV, without losing its individuality, should become a palace of the entire people; and that the bygone spirit of absolutism should give shelter to the spirit of modern liberty. Versailles, therefore, erected as a homage to individual pride, has become, under the Orleans régime, a great national monument—and certainly the most complete and splendid of its class in all Europe."

The great galleries of the Versailles Museum contain a pictorial record of the lives of famous kings, queens, favorites and warriors, and representations of great battles. The Gallery of Napoleon, created by removing the partitions from a dozen rooms, presents a complete history of the Emperor's career.

"This Versailles," exclaims a writer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, "does it not attract to our country strangers without number, does it not lend lasting prestige to the land of France? . . . Outside of the Hotel des Invalides and the Louvre, what edifices equal it in evoking the memorable period with which they are associated? What lasting respect do these annals of stones and bronze merit from men of taste! These salons, gardens, statues, works of art, attached irrevocably to the Past, bid us pause and ponder long upon the matchless Story of Versailles."

WRITTEN FOR THE MENTOR BY F. L. PAYNE
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THE HALL OF MIRRORS, VERSAILLES

FROM AUTOCRACY TO LIBERTY

IF ever in history a ruler's monument endured the mock of his memory, Versailles is that monument. Louis XIV will forever remain the archetype of autocracy, and Versailles, his creation, is still the concrete and manifest symbol of his absolutism. "The State, It is I." Versailles fixed those words in marble and bronze; yet it is toward Versailles that the leaders of democracy are today turning for the momentous conferences which must forever consign autocracy to a forlorn place among the things that have died.

The first three chapters in the history of Versailles told almost the whole story of French absolutism; its glory at the close of the seventeenth century, when Europe came and went at a motion of the French monarch's hand, when Molière and Racine, Bossuet and Fénelon, made French literature the greatest of its day, when Mansard and Perrault built palaces and Vauban forts, when Turenne and Condé won battles against allied Europe; its decay during the reign of Louis' incompetent great-grandson, dwindling to the final scandal of the Dubarry; its brief apparent revival in the gayeties of the Trianon, led by Marie Antoinette, closing only with the fifth of October, prison and the guillotine.

With Napoleon, Versailles passed into desuetude. The Corsican artillery officer had made himself emperor through his amazing gift of appealing to the popular imagination; Versailles was no fit place for an emperor of obscure birth. The kings who followed Waterloo were afraid of the ghosts which haunted it, knowing that the day had passed when a French monarch could ignore the Paris mob. Louis Philippe, indeed, bourgeois king as he was, spent some five million dollars in restoring Versailles, much of the outlay being for works of art commemorative of the greatness of France; but Louis Philippe and the tradition of Versailles were poles asunder. As for Napoleon III, his object was too manifestly the apeing of his great namesake to lead him back into the paths of eighteenth-century royalty. Yet it was thanks to him that an astonishing chapter was written into the history of Versailles.

Bismarck and Napoleon between them—with some careful planning by Moltke and a few egregious blunders by Bazaine to help—brought the Prussians to the gates of Paris. During the siege Versailles was the headquarters for the invading Germans. Again the place saw the signing of an armistice, this time the tragic one transferring from France to Germany most of Alsace and Lorraine, and binding the conquered nation to pay an indemnity of one billion dollars. That was in 1871.

It was in Versailles that the King of Prussia was proclaimed Emperor of Germany, and—once again the sudden leap from autocracy to democracy—two days after he left the palace, the National Assembly of France moved in. The Commune ruled in distracted Paris, and republican France was governed from the home of Louis XIV. It was the official seat of the two chambers till 1879, and thus the capital of the nation. Here, in the very shadow of the equestrian statue of Louis XIV, were laid the solid foundations for the new republic which, today in triumph, is sending its delegates to the conference destined forever to put an end to that principle of autocratic government of which Versailles was once the world's outstanding symbol.

—Selections from an article by Henry Adams Bellows in *The Bellman*.

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